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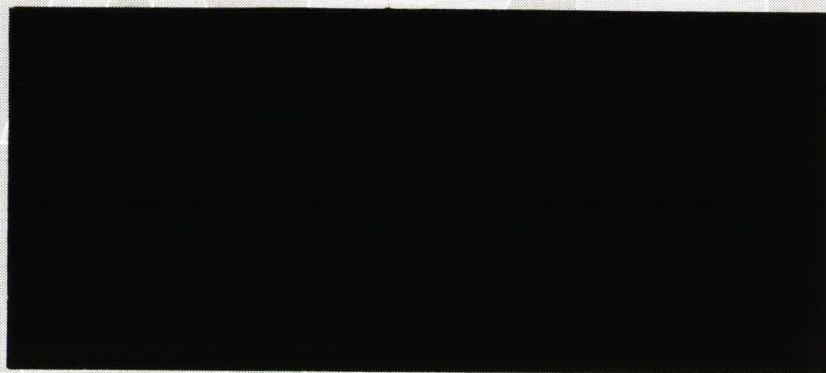
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PAPER

**Bourdieu's Concept of Habitus
and the Resolution of the Agency
Structure Dilemma within Demography**

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**Bourdieu's Concept of Habitus
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1. Introduction

How will government policy in support of women's emancipation affect labour force participation, relationship formation, family formation and the dissolution of relationships in the long term? This is the question I have tried to answer in the course of my research-project. In order to do so, however, it was necessary for me to first establish a theoretical frame of reference to describe the relationship between social conditions (including government policy) and demographic behaviour. I assessed the useability of established demographic theoretical approaches on the basis of two criteria: firstly, how a particular approach resolves the 'agent-structure dilemma' and secondly, how much consideration it gives to gender relationships. These two criteria are discussed briefly below.

The central theme of my research is the impact of government policy (representing, as it does, one aspect of the social context) on women's behaviour. Underlying this issue is the pivotal question of how much influence should be attributed to social conditions, or in this case government policy, and to the autonomy and freedom of choice of individuals. This classic question, sometimes known as the agency - structure dilemma, is a recurrent, if at times only implicit, feature of all social sciences. It is, in theory, possible to distinguish two positions in this respect: a deterministic and a voluntaristic standpoint. The underlying assumption of deterministic approaches is that social conditions ultimately determine human behaviour. Voluntaristic theories, on the other hand, presuppose that individuals ultimately determine their own behaviour. If my research is to properly assess the influence of social conditions (i.e. emancipation policy) on the production of behaviour on the one hand, and the freedom individuals exercise when expressing that behaviour on the other hand, it is

important to use an approach which accommodates both the deterministic and voluntaristic aspects of behaviour, since people's behaviour will at times be more determined by social conditions, and in other situations more influenced by an individual's behavioural freedom.

The second issue I wish to focus on is the unequal balance of power between the sexes. Women live their lives in the context of a structurally unequal balance of power between the sexes. It is therefore desirable that any theories I might use should take account of gender relationships or at least offer clear points of departure to enable the relevance of gender relationships to be included in the analysis. The importance of this second issue is all the more relevant, given that the ultimate aim of the independent variable in my research (emancipation policy) is to redress the unequal balance of power between the sexes.

In this presentation I will only very briefly address the demographic theories, for I have eventually opted for a theory developed outside that context and which has scarcely been used in demographic research. In my view this theory (Bourdieu's 'theory of practices') offers a better resolution of the agency - structure dilemma and offers better possibilities to include the relevance of gender relations in the analysis.

2. Theoretical approaches used in demography

In my search for a suitable theoretical frame of reference I began by considering the use of established demographic approaches. As you can read in my thesis I studied the usefulness of sociological and anthropological approaches (namely the 'theory of demographic transition' and the 'wealth flows theory'), the usefulness of micro-economic approaches and that of social-psychological approaches.

For now I will only mention my conclusions. Although all of these theoretical approaches have their merits and contribute to the explanation of demographic behaviour, they are not really useable in my research. Broadly spoken, sociological and anthropological approaches over-emphasize the relevance of the social context and fail to elaborate sufficiently on the behavioural freedom of individuals. Micro-economic and social-psychological approaches on the other hand pay too little attention to the relevance of the social context and over-

emphasize the behavioural freedom of individuals. But all of the approaches fail to address the relevance of the unequal balance of power between the sexes in an adequate way.

I therefore looked outside the confines of demography and opted for some theoretical concepts that are developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

3. Pierre Bourdieu: a theory of practices

Bourdieu's work is characterised by three recurrent basic principles: habitus, field and capital. Bourdieu uses these concepts to explain the production of practices. The concepts are fairly complex and their meaning is enhanced by their interrelationship.

3.1 *Habitus*

Habitus is one of the most important concepts Bourdieu uses. Habitus is a collective term for all the durable dispositions an individual acquires and which function as unconscious schemes of perception, appreciation and action. Bourdieu describes habitus, amongst other things, as 'necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions' (Bourdieu 1984: 170). Habitus offers individuals schemes for classifying reality, for perceiving things as good or bad, desirable or undesirable, for doing particular things and for doing things in a particular way. According to Bourdieu, habitus is a concept which above all represents an attitude, a particular way of construing and understanding the specific 'logic' of practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 77).

In Bourdieu's view, one of the most important qualities of habitus is that it makes a virtue of necessity. Habitus 'produces strategies which are adapted objectively to the objective situation, even though they are neither the outcome of explicit ends consciously aimed at, nor the consequence of a mechanistic determination by external causes. Social behaviour is governed by a 'practical sense' or 'a sense of the game' (Bourdieu 1988: 64). This practical sense is founded on past experiences. Moulded as it is by conditions and experiences from the past, habitus contains schemes which are objectively compatible with these conditions and which have in a sense been pre-adapted to their demands. 'The most improbable

practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable' (Bourdieu 1990; 54).

Habitus is a type of psychological structure (Welten 1989) which develops as a result of a person's upbringing and socialisation in the specific social context (Bourdieu speaks of conditions of existence) in which an individual is raised. Habitus regulates our behaviour in a way which makes the traces of the conditions of existence apparent. Different types of habitus (e.g. class habitus) occur by virtue of the fact that individuals are raised in different circumstances. These different types of habitus, in turn, produce different practices. (Bourdieu uses the collective term 'lifestyle' to denote all practices generated by a habitus).

'Habitus' is the concept Bourdieu in fact uses to try to resolve the agency - structure dilemma and in so doing he is reacting to both voluntaristic and deterministic theories. 'My main aim was to explain the most basic kinds of practices, such as ritualistic behaviour, whether or not to marry, everyday economic behaviour, and so on. In so doing, I wanted to get away from both objectivism, in which behaviour is viewed as a mechanical reaction in which agents are not involved, and from subjectivism, in which behaviour is described as the deliberate enactment of a conscious intention, the voluntary strategy of a conscious mind which formulates its own goals and maximises its benefits by means of rational calculations' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 77). Habitus is both the result of, and the precondition for, behaviour and for the reproduction of social structures. Or, as Brouns puts it: 'It is an active creative relationship to the world, but at the same time a socialised form of subjectivity' (Brouns 1993: 122).

Although Bourdieu is quite clearly an opponent of rational choice theories (which he accuses of subjectivism), he does not deny the fact that rational considerations (such as weighing up pros and cons) can play a part. 'Habitus is what has to be presupposed in order to understand that social agents are 'reasonable' although not necessarily rational; in other words, they do not gear their behaviour towards maximising their return on the resources available to them, or, to put it in simpler terms, they do not calculate, they do not make their goals explicit and they do not combine the resources available to them to attain those goals; in short they make no combinations, plans, schemes' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 84).

As stated earlier, habitus comes about in a specific social context: the conditions of existence. Different types of habitus develop due to the fact that these conditions of existence vary according to time and place. Bourdieu tends to confine his discussions in this context to class habitus. In his view, habitus is a concept which can be used to further investigate the effects of 'class'. The question is, can habitus also be used to analyse gender?

In his examination of sexual inequality, Bourdieu uses the terms 'masculine domination' and 'masculine order'. He effectively views masculine order as one of the social conditions of existence which, as a result of socialisation, is expressed in the habitus of individuals. 'The process of socialisation brings about a gradual 'somaticising' of gender domination' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 118). The result of this socialisation is that 'masculine order (...) [is] largely taken for granted as a result of the quasi-authorization conferred by, and the compatibility of, social structures as expressed in the social organisation of time and space and the division of labour between the sexes on the one hand, and the cognitive structures which have become incorporated in people's bodies and minds on the other' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 117). In other words, the habitus's schemes of perception and appreciation are gender-specific and gender-specifying.

Certain authors (Michielsens 1987; Risseeuw 1988; Delhay 1991) consequently maintain that there is scope for assuming the existence of a separate gender habitus within Bourdieu's theoretical framework, given that the inequality between the sexes within society is also a durable condition of existence in which people adopt different positions and on the basis of which they develop a different habitus. The underlying assumption of the above authors in this context is that there are two forms of gender habitus, or as Delhay puts it 'a feminine and masculine set of dispositions.' Risseeuw elaborates as follows: 'From a feminist point of view (...) one has to distinguish two forms of habitus. A man learns he is part of a group, but also that he is a man as opposed to a woman. How 'being a man' is conceptualized in a given society at a given time also greatly influences his perception of the options and strategies available to him. A similar argument holds for women' (Risseeuw 1988: 190).

As far as I am aware, Bourdieu has never expressed an explicit opinion on the view that two forms of gender habitus can be distinguished. On the face of it, it seems conceivable that he might endorse this argument to some extent. The masculine order he refers to can, to use his

terms, be viewed as belonging to the 'doxa'. The doxa is that over which a silent consensus exists, all things which are taken for granted. The doxa includes classification systems such as the existence of two forms of gender. Socialisation (Bourdieu also refers to the 'work of inculcation') 'which is both sexually differentiated and sexually differentiating, imposes different sets of dispositions upon men and women' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 118). The forms of gender habitus generated as a result of this will vary according to time and place.

In an interview, however, Bourdieu pointed to the risks inherent in analyzing masculine domination; in my view, he was implying that it was dubious to presume that two forms of gender habitus exist. Masculine domination 'involves an institution which has been imprinted in the objectivity of social structures and the subjectivity of mental structures for thousands of years; if analyzed, there is a great risk of using categories of perception and thought as *means* of knowledge, when they should actually be treated as *objects* of knowledge' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 117).

Bourdieu would not, in any event, consider gender to be the dominant scheme of perception and appreciation in all cases (and it is equally debatable whether Michielsens, Risseuw and Delhay would). In certain circumstances, other 'dimensions' of habitus, such as class and age, will be more important (even though, for example, the schemes of class habitus are also gender-specific and gender-specifying).

3.2 *Capital*

A second basic concept used by Bourdieu is capital. He distinguishes between three basic types of capital: economic, cultural and social. He uses the term economic capital to denote capital which is readily convertible into cash and which can be institutionalised in rights of ownership. Cultural capital can take three forms: it can be in an incorporated state, i.e. in the form of an individual person's durable dispositions; in an objectified state (e.g. books, paintings, machines); and in an institutionalised state (degrees and diplomas). And, finally, there is social capital, which Bourdieu describes as 'all the existing or potential resources which arise from having a more or less institutionalised durable network of relationships of mutual respect - or which arise from belonging to a group - which provides each of its members with the support of the collective accumulated capital, 'credentials' which make

them creditworthy in the broadest sense of the word' (Bourdieu 1986: 132).

In addition to these three basic types of capital, Bourdieu says a fourth exists: symbolic capital, which is usually called prestige, reputation or fame. It is in the form of symbolic capital that the different types of capital are perceived and acknowledged as self-evident and legitimate.

Bourdieu sometimes refers to agents also as 'bearers of capital' and describes capital as accumulated, 'incorporated' labour which individual agents or groups are capable of acquiring. The accumulation of capital and its conversion from one type of capital into another must be paid for with money, labour, effort and above all time (Delhay 1991: 141).

The position of a particular agent can be ascertained on the basis of his or her accumulated capital (in terms of both volume and structure). This accumulated capital is changeable. The volume and structure of capital a person has can, for example, change if they undertake training or enter into a (marital) relationship, and the value of a particular type of capital can also change over a period of time.

Bourdieu gives relatively little consideration to the gendered nature of the division of capital. Numerous authors have, however, stressed the importance of this type of analysis. Delhay, for example, maintains that the accumulation of economic and symbolic capital is predominantly a male preoccupation. In her view, it is generally considered more legitimate for men to accumulate capital, with the result that men acquire more symbolic capital than women (Delhay 1991: 138-143). Blees-Booij's research into the division of capital amongst professionals (1992) suggested that female equivalents of occupations featured systematically on the bottom rung of the economic status ladder.

In my view, it is very important that the gendered nature of the division of capital be considered in order to gain a broader insight into the unequal balance of power between the sexes. The distinctions Bourdieu draws between different types of capital provide scope for making a balanced analysis, which would need to assess the value of the different types of capital in different situations, the extent to which capital is divided on a gender-specific basis

and how successful men and women are in increasing their capital or in converting it into different (in this case more valuable) types of capital.

3.3 *Field*

Bourdieu's third basic concept is field. This is the term he uses to denote what is usually referred to in the Netherlands as 'world' (e.g. the world of politics, science, art etc). He describes a field as a network or configuration of relationships between positions which exert pressure on the individuals occupying those positions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 58). Each field dictates its own values and has its own governing principles. 'These principles define the boundaries of a socially structured space within which agents - depending on the position they occupy in that space - struggle to change or perpetuate that space's boundaries and configuration' (Wacquant 1992: 20). But in addition to exerting pressure, the fields also provide scope for behaviour. Habitus and capital only have significance within fields.

Although each field is different and has its own rules, Bourdieu maintains there are universal rules which apply to all fields. A field's structure, for example, is defined by the structure of the division of various types of capital operating in that field. Capital is unequally divided amongst agents and the hierarchy of the various types of capital differs from one field to another.

Each field is the scene of a perpetual struggle for the division of capital. One important aspect of this struggle is who is permitted access to a particular field; the volume and structure of the capital are also very important. But Bourdieu maintains that it is impossible to generalise about which elements of social status are constant and universal determinants.

Bourdieu emphasises the fact that the concepts of field and capital are closely linked and interdependent. The value of a particular type of capital is, in effect, dependent upon the existence of a field in which that capital has significance. In Bourdieu's view, it is consequently 'irrelevant whether we are trying to establish what a field is, where its boundaries lie, or whether we are trying to establish which different types of capital are operating in a field, within which boundaries their effects are felt, and so on' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 59).

According to Bourdieu, the social universe is made up of a multiplicity and great variety of fields. He gives no precise definition of what is or is not a field and appears to have a fairly pragmatic approach to the concept which he sees as forming part of his 'toolbox'. He tends to apply the concept of field to fairly broad contexts (say, the artistic or economic field) but he also applies it to more limited contexts (e.g. to companies, ministries and occupational groups).

If we accept that social space consists of many different fields, the question which then arises is how these fields relate to one another. In Bourdieu's view, however, this is too complex a question to answer in general terms. 'This is because I believe that there is no such thing as a transhistoric law governing the relationships between fields' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 68). The fact that the economic field is a powerful force in industrial societies does not, in his opinion, mean that the economy should be seen as the sole determining factor. Relationships between fields are never permanently fixed. Their interrelationship should be the focus of constant re-examination, particularly in the context of research.

I would like to digress briefly here by interjecting Bourdieu's views on 'the State', which are interesting in the context of my research into the role of government policy. Bourdieu sees 'the State' as a sort of meta-field, which is in his view often mistakenly regarded as a clearly defined entity which enters into external relationships with external forces which are in their turn clearly defined. It is, in fact 'a collection of bureaucratic or administrative fields (such as committees) within which agents and groups of agents, who come either from within or outside government, compete either personally or by proxy for that particular type of power conferred by regulating a particular area of practices (...) by means of laws, regulations, administrative measures (subsidies, licences, etc), in short everything that comes under the heading of policy' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 69). Government policy, therefore, is the outcome of a struggle at a particular point in time.

3.4 *Practices*

I will conclude my description of the three basic concepts of habitus, capital and field by summarising how the production of practices should be viewed in the context of these concepts. The word 'practices' is used to indicate the behaviour of (all kinds of) actors, for

example demographic behaviour like whether or not to marry and the timing of the birth of children. Bourdieu summarizes the production of practices in the formula: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practices (Bourdieu 1984: 101). Agents develop a particular habitus during the course of their lives and accumulate a certain volume of different types of capital. They operate in social space and in various fields. Practices are determined by habitus and field on the one hand and by the structure of, and possibilities offered by, a field on the other.

'Social ageing is nothing other than the slow renunciation or disinvestment (socially assisted and encouraged) which leads agents to adjust their aspirations to their objective chances, to espouse their condition, become what they are and make do with what they have, even if this entails deceiving themselves as to what they are and what they have, with collective complicity, and accepting bereavement of all the 'lateral possible' they have abandoned along the way' (Bourdieu 1984: 111).

In order to be able to use research to understand certain practices, it is necessary to establish which of an agent's properties play a part in a given field. We therefore have to establish 'the form taken, in that field, by the objectified and internalized capital (properties and habitus) which defines social class and constitutes the principle of the production of (...) practices' (Bourdieu 1984: 114).

4. The usefulness of Bourdieu's concepts for demographic research

In the previous section I described the three central concepts Bourdieu uses in his work. I will now consider whether, and to what extent, they provide a basis for the theoretical frame of reference needed for my research. I will therefore apply the two criteria mentioned at the beginning of this paper (resolution of the agent-structure dilemma and scope for taking account of the unequal balance of power between the sexes) to Bourdieu's concepts. Having already discussed these criteria earlier, I will make do with a brief description.

In principle, the different theoretical concepts formulated by Bourdieu and discussed earlier appear capable of providing a basis for establishing a theoretical frame of reference. His

habitus concept can be used to resolve the agent-structure dilemma. Bourdieu does not lapse into determinism, nor does he attribute an excessive degree of autonomy and freedom of choice to individuals. I will not elaborate further on this point, having already discussed it in some detail in the previous section.

I have also discussed my second criterion (focusing attention on the unequal balance of power between the sexes) on numerous occasions. Bourdieu's concepts provide scope for considering the role of gender relationships in determining behaviour. Take, for example, his concept of habitus. As I mentioned earlier, Bourdieu maintains that 'masculine order' is expressed in the habitus of individuals through socialisation. The habitus's schemes of perception, appreciation and action are gender-specific and gender-specifying. In terms of his concept of field, we saw earlier that it was very important to establish what the accumulated capital of agents was in order to gain an insight into their social status, and that it was also important to establish how gendered the division of capital was.

What remains to be seen is how the concepts of habitus, capital, field and practices can be used in my research. Bourdieu suggests various ways in which this can be done, one of which is to begin by constructing various classes. 'One must construct the *objective class*, the set of agents who are placed in homogenous conditions of existence imposing homogenous conditionings and producing homogenous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices; and who possess a set of common properties, objectified properties, sometimes legally guaranteed (as possession of goods and power) or properties embodied as class habitus (and, in particular, systems of classificatory schemes)' (Bourdieu 1984: 101). This entails examining different variables (Bourdieu suggests occupation, income, sex, ethnic origin, level of education, age) and establishing their importance and interrelationship.

Having decided against using Bourdieu's concept of 'class', I would like to interpret the above quotation (somewhat loosely). What needs to be identified and established are categories of women with common conditions of existence which determine both the scope and limitations of their behaviour and generate dispositions (habitus) which govern their behaviour. These categories of women possess similar properties, in terms of both accumulated capital and habitus (I use habitus in this context as the collective term for all schemes

of perception, appreciation and action), that is to say properties which are important within the specific context of labour force participation, family and relationship formation, and the dissolution of relationships.

Given these properties, women live in what Bourdieu describes in general terms as 'social space', which is made up of many fields. Women are active in various fields which each dictate their own values and have their own governing principles. Given a particular habitus and a particular volume of different types of capital, women function within the different fields and take part in the struggle for the division of capital. Their behaviour is ultimately determined by both their habitus and accumulated capital, and by the structure of, and possibilities offered by, different fields.

Therefore, in order to explain women's behaviour, we need to take account of the fields they are active in, and, equally important, the values dictated by, and principles governing, those fields. Bearing in mind the behaviour which is the focus of my research, many fields are important, e.g. the labour market, a particular occupational sector, a particular company, the family, a person's household, the marriage market and so on. Each field has to be examined to answer the following: which of an agent's properties are determining factors? How valuable are the different types of capital in each field? How is capital divided amongst women, and amongst men and women? The struggle being fought in a particular field (e.g. in the labour market, within a household etc) also needs to be considered: how successful are women in accumulating capital, in increasing their accumulated capital and in converting one type of capital into another, more valuable, type of capital, and how do they go about this? Another important consideration is how the various fields interrelate.

In my research, emancipation policy will be interpreted as the outcome of a struggle in the field of politics, and in that sense it will represent an established fact which influences women's behaviour. On the one hand, this policy is one aspect of the conditions of existence and, as such, affects the habitus of (different categories) of women. In this way, the policy may bring about a change in the habitus of women. On the other hand, public policy will influence women's behaviour via the habitus. The habitus acts as a sort of intermediary; the schemes of perception, appreciation and action determine in effect how women will react to different policy measures.

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